

# 1 Introduction

This chapter gives a general overview of the volume by first explaining the research background and rationale, followed by a description of the aims and scope of the research.

The aim is to orient the reader to the desire of this research to lead to better test designs to assess academic writing skills by an explicit specification of the reading-into-writing construct.

The chapter covers the following areas:

- the underrepresentation of high-level processes in L2 teaching and assessments
- the use of integrated assessment tasks as a method to test academic writing skills
- the insufficient attention to reading-into-writing in the English Profile
- an overview of each chapter in the volume.

## 1.1 Background

The English Profile Studies series aims to expand our understanding of the way learners progress through the six levels of the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR, Council of Europe 2001). The previous volumes have expanded our understanding of different aspects of the criterial features of L2 English at each level of the CEFR, for example, *the properties of learner language* in volume 1 (Hawkins and Filipović 2012), *language functions* in volume 2 (Green 2012), *grammar* and *vocabulary* in volume 5 (Harrison and Barker (Eds) 2015). In this volume, drawing on a comprehensive review of the literature on integrated reading-into-writing skills, we will report a range of empirical research which aimed to define learners' integrated reading-into-writing processes in academic contexts, and to identify the task variables which need to be considered for their contribution to the difficulty of integrated tasks. This volume is useful for teachers whose task is to prepare L2 students for the demands of writing from sources in academic contexts. Language test developers would also find the proposed reading-into-writing framework, which includes explicit target contextual (task) features and cognitive (learners' processes) parameters, useful as they design integrated assessment tasks at the CEFR Levels B2 and C1.

## Defining Integrated Reading-into-Writing Constructs

### **Underrepresentation of high-level processes in L2 teaching and assessments**

Teaching and assessment of L2 learning of English have focused on the mastery of the ‘four independent skills’, i.e. reading, writing, speaking and listening. Weir, Vidaković and Galaczi (2013) conducted a comprehensive review of the practice of language assessment in the 20th century. Their findings reveal that such an approach to assessing language abilities unfortunately led to a significant underrepresentation of some, mostly high-level, processes required in the target language use (TLU) domain. For example, they observed that most standardised reading tests target lower-level processes such as *extracting factual information*, *establishing meaning at clause or sentence level*, and *inferencing the author’s viewpoint*. However, high-level processes, which are essential in the academic contexts, such as *understanding ideas at textuall/inter-textual levels*, and *integrating ideas from multiple sources*, are largely neglected in the reading tests they analysed. A similar issue of underrepresenting high-level processes was identified in almost all writing tests Weir, Vidaković et al (2013) surveyed. These commonly used tests mainly assessed students’ abilities of writing by the knowledge telling approach (Scardamalia and Bereiter 1987), i.e. how well writers construct a written discourse from their own background knowledge on the topic. However, mastery in telling one’s knowledge is hardly sufficient in real-life academic contexts where students are often expected to use the knowledge transformation approach (Scardamalia and Bereiter 1987) in which they transform or create knowledge from sources by connecting and building relationships between existing facts and ideas. Unfortunately, as noted by Weir, Vidaković et al (2013), this essential writing skill of transforming knowledge from sources has largely been neglected in L2 writing pedagogy and assessments.

The problem of underrepresentation of high-level processes was largely due to the heavy reliance on independent language tasks in L2 teaching and assessments. In the case of writing, previous research has shown that task type, among other variables such as writers’ characteristics and mode of writing, has a significant impact on writers’ choice of writing approach and hence the processes involved in writing (Severinson Eklundh and Kollberg 2003, Weigle 2002). In other words, independent language tasks, however well constructed, are not likely to elicit these desirable high-level processes required in the academic contexts. One obvious solution is, therefore, to use a different task type in L2 teaching and assessment.

## **Integrated assessment tasks as an alternative to elicit high-level processes**

Based on the nature of the processing involved, language tasks can be categorised into independent and integrated tasks. Independent tasks aim to assess only one language skill, either reading, listening, speaking or writing. For example, while some reading and writing skills are usually involved in a listening task, they are not part of the construct being assessed. Writing-only tasks refer to impromptu writing tasks in which students are asked to respond to a short task prompt (instructions). One typical example of writing-only tasks is an impromptu argumentative essay task which is used extensively in large-scale academic writing tests, such as International English Language Testing System (IELTS), Test of English as a Foreign Language (TOEFL®), Aptis and Cambridge English Qualifications.

Integrated tasks, on the other hand, require students to employ more than one language skill to complete the communicative goal of the task. Integrated reading-into-writing tasks typically require students to produce a written discourse in response to some reading materials. In pedagogical context, reading-into-writing refers to those ‘instructional tasks that combine reading and writing for various education purposes’ (Asencion-Delaney 2008:140). Flower, Stein, Ackerman, Kantz, McCormick and Peck (1990) defined reading-into-writing as ‘the process of a person who reads a relevant book, an article, a letter, knowing he or she needs to write’ (1990:6). From the perspective of language testing, Weigle (2004) defines reading-into-writing as ‘a test that integrates reading with writing by having examinees read and respond to one or more source texts’ (2004:30).

Before we discuss our working definition of ‘reading-into-writing’, it is worth clarifying some related terminologies. Although some researchers use the terminology ‘reading-to-write’ or ‘writing from sources’, the term ‘reading-into-writing’ is usually used by large-scale testing providers as a category to refer to this task type. Due to the focus on language testing, the terminology of ‘reading-into-writing’ is therefore used throughout this volume. Reading-into-writing tasks are sometimes referred to as ‘discourse synthesis’ tasks due to the influential work conducted by Spivey (1984, 1990, 1997, Spivey and King 1989). Their work investigated how writers select, organise, and connect ideas from different reading source texts into a writing product (their findings will be discussed in detail in Section 2.3). However, this volume considers discourse synthesis tasks to be a subordinate type of the reading-into-writing tasks because apart from discourse synthesis, there are other processes, such as summarising, comparing and contrasting, and prioritising ideas, involved in different types of reading-into-writing tasks. In this volume, we define reading-into-writing as a task that requires students to write a continuous text by drawing upon single or multiple reading materials

## Defining Integrated Reading-into-Writing Constructs

which can be verbal, non-verbal or both. Students may or may not need to find additional reading materials on their own. Common reading-into-writing tasks include, but are not limited to, summary, an essay based on multiple sources, report writing from multiple sources, case study, review, and library research paper (more details about the common reading-into-writing tasks used in academic contexts will be provided in Section 2.1).

With improved language teaching and testing literacy, there has been a renewed interest in using integrated tasks to assess language proficiency over the past decade. Integrated tasks have been introduced in the Internet-Based Test of English of a Foreign Language (TOEFL iBT), the General English Proficiency Test (GEPT) Advanced test in Taiwan, and university-wide language programmes (Plakans 2008, Weigle 2004). Based on a series of test review and redevelopment projects, Trinity College London has reinforced the role of the reading-into-writing task in its suite of Integrated Skills in English (ISE) (Chan, Inoue and Taylor 2015). The use of integrated assessment tasks as an alternative to the dominantly used independent tasks has not only generated interest in the field of language testing; researchers in relevant fields, such as L2 teaching and learning and academic literacy, have argued that integration of reading and writing skills is essential for academic success (Carson 2001, Carson and Leki 1993, Flower 1990, Grabe 2001, 2003, Johns 1993, Leki and Carson 1994, 1997, Lenski and Johns 1997). It is, therefore, important to expose L2 students, and arguably L1 students with less academic writing experience, to integrated tasks in their training.

While there is a widespread growth in popularity of integrated reading-into-writing tasks in standardised English language proficiency (ELP) tests and English for academic purposes (EAP) classrooms, researchers have complained that there is insufficient empirical validity evidence of this test task format in the literature (Asencion 2004, Esmaeili 2002, Plakans 2008, 2010, Weigle 2004). As Yu (2013) noted in a special issue of *Language Assessment Quarterly* which was dedicated to integrated reading-into-writing assessment, ‘while integrated assessment has fascinated the field by its promising validity, the multidimensionality and complexity of its nature has sparked inquiries and concerns’ (2013:110). Given the widespread demand of using integrated assessment, it is now time to provide a more comprehensive and consistent theoretical framework which allows us to systematically research, develop and assess integrated language assessment.

### **Insufficient attention to reading-into-writing in the English Profile**

Due to the widespread awareness and use of the CEFR around the world today as a framework of reference for language learning, teaching and assessment, it has become desirable for test developers to bring the CEFR into the

## Introduction

test design from the early stages of construct definition (Harsch and Rupp 2011). The CEFR describes what language learners can do at various stages of their learning. The CEFR describes language learners in relation to three groups of six broad levels of ability: the Basic User (A1 Breakthrough and A2 Waystage), the Independent User (B1 Threshold and B2 Vantage) and the Proficient User (C1 Effective Operational Proficiency and C2 Mastery). The CEFR global scale descriptors (see Table 1.1) give a useful indication of the level of skill and quality of performance that is expected of a second language user at each of the six levels. Relating test design to the CEFR is believed to facilitate stakeholders' understanding of task features and the expected student performance at each of the CEFR levels.

However, the CEFR global scale makes little reference to integrated skills, i.e. how language users at different levels can employ more than one macro skill, i.e. reading, writing, listening or speaking, to complete the communicative functions of a task. The only reference to integrated skills is at C2 level (highlighted in bold in Table 1.1). This seems to convey a message that integrated skills are evidence of a degree of language proficiency unique to the highest level.

In addition to the global scale, the CEFR provides Can Do statements to describe what learners at each level can do across four language skills: speaking (spoken interaction and spoken production), listening, reading and writing. The CEFR recognises that there are two distinct types of speaking skills in relation to the learner's speaking production, and their ability to take part in conversations and discussion where listening is involved. However, the CEFR does not distinguish the learner's ability to write from their own internal resources and their ability to write from sources where reading is involved.

Given the fact that the CEFR is designed to be language neutral, the English Profile project was funded by Cambridge University Press, Cambridge Assessment English and the European Commission (November 2009–12) as a research programme to 'help teachers and educationalists understand what the Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR) means for English' (see [www.englishprofile.org](http://www.englishprofile.org)). Based on data collected from real learners of English by corpus research techniques, English Profile describes what aspects of English are typically learned at each CEFR level in terms of Reference Level Descriptors (RLDs) (Council of Europe 2001, 2009). These RLDs in turn serve as a framework to classify, systematise and compare learner production of the English language. It is hoped that the framework could inform teachers, curriculum developers, coursebook authors and test writers what is suitable for learning and testing at each level.

Since its publication, the CEFR has become influential in building a shared understanding of performance levels for foreign language learners. While the CEFR distinguishes between learners' speaking production and

## Defining Integrated Reading-into-Writing Constructs

**Table 1.1 Common Reference Levels: global scale (Council of Europe 2001:24; author's emphases)**

<b>Proficient Users</b>	<b>C2</b>	Can understand with ease virtually everything heard or read. <b>Can summarise information from different spoken and written sources, reconstructing arguments and accounts in a coherent presentation.</b> Can express him/herself spontaneously, very fluently and precisely, differentiating finer shades of meaning even in more complex situations.
	<b>C1</b>	Can understand a wide range of demanding, longer texts, and recognise implicit meaning. Can express him/herself fluently and spontaneously without much obvious searching for expressions. Can use language flexibly and effectively for social, academic and professional purposes. Can produce clear, well-structured, detailed text on complex subjects, showing controlled use of organisational patterns, connectors and cohesive devices.
<b>Independent Users</b>	<b>B2</b>	Can understand the main ideas of complex text on both concrete and abstract topics, including technical discussions in his/her field of specialisation. Can interact with a degree of fluency and spontaneity that makes regular interaction with native speakers quite possible without strain for either party. Can produce clear, detailed text on a wide range of subjects and explain a viewpoint on a topical issue giving the advantages and disadvantages of various options.
	<b>B1</b>	Can understand the main points of clear standard input on familiar matters regularly encountered in work, school, leisure, etc. Can deal with most situations likely to arise whilst travelling in an area where the language is spoken. Can produce simple connected text on topics which are familiar or of personal interest. Can describe experiences and events, dreams, hopes and ambitions and briefly give reasons and explanations for opinions and plans.
<b>Basic Users</b>	<b>A2</b>	Can understand sentences and frequently used expressions related to areas of most immediate relevance (e.g. very basic personal and family information, shopping, local geography, employment). Can communicate in simple and routine tasks requiring a simple and direct exchange of information on familiar and routine matters. Can describe in simple terms aspects of his/her background, immediate environment and matters in areas of immediate need.
	<b>A1</b>	Can understand and use familiar everyday expressions and very basic phrases aimed at the satisfaction of needs of a concrete type. Can introduce him/herself and others and can ask and answer questions about personal details such as where he/she lives, people he/she knows and things he/she has. Can interact in a simple way provided the other person talks slowly and clearly and is prepared to help.

their ability to integrate listening and speaking when taking part in conversations and discussion as two separate skills, the writing skill focuses predominantly on learners' ability to produce written discourse from their own knowledge. There is almost no description of learners' ability to write from reading sources in the CEFR, which is the aim of this volume. The only reference to integrated reading-into-writing skills in the global scale of the CEFR is at the highest C2 level. Similarly, for the CEFR self-assessment grid, integrated skills are covered only under the category of writing at the level of C2:

## Introduction

‘I can write summaries and reviews of professional or literary works’ (Council of Europe 2009:27). Besides, these Can Do statements seem to emphasise the genre and have little reference to the integration of skills and/or the processes involved in these skills.

One could argue that the CEFR deals with learners’ ability of integrating reading and writing in relation to *mediation*,<sup>1</sup> which is defined as follows:

The written and/or oral activities of mediation make communication possible between persons who are unable, for whatever reason, to communicate with each other directly. Translation or interpretation, a paraphrase, summary or record, provides for a third party a (re)formulation of a source text to which this third party does not have direct access. Mediating language activities – (re)processing an existing text – occupy an important place in the normal linguistic functioning of our societies (Council of Europe 2001:14).

However, the written mediation activities referred to by the CEFR aim to serve as an intermediary between the original writer of a text and its un(intended) reader. According to the CEFR’s definition, learners who engage in mediation activities are not concerned with expressing their own meanings, but with narrowing the gap of misunderstanding by, for example, paraphrasing specialised texts for lay persons. Therefore, in our view, these written mediation activities are different from the integrated reading-into-writing skills required of students in academic contexts (see Section 2.3).

While it is a general belief that integrated reading-into-writing skills involve a certain level of mastery of the individual reading (e.g. to comprehend texts) and writing skills (e.g. to produce clear, well-structured, detailed text on complex subjects), empirical evidence has revealed that integrated reading-into-writing skills are different from the ability to employ those two individual skills one after another (Asencion-Delaney 2008, Hirvela 2004). Furthermore, L1 studies which investigated younger writers’ (i.e. Grade 6, 8 and 10 in US schools) abilities to write informational reports from sources found that these students’ abilities to select, organise content from the sources and provide connections between ideas progressed along their grade level (Spivey and King 1989). In this case, there is a need to fill the gap in the CEFR by defining how integrated reading-into-writing skills progress across the CEFR levels with a consideration of the relevant task factors.

In addition to the underrepresentation of reading-into-writing in the global scale of the CEFR, this same issue can be found in the more detailed illustrative scales (see Table 1.2); most of the descriptors concern the use of

---

1 At the time of this volume’s publication, a Companion Volume to the CEFR (Council of Europe 2018) is being prepared to extend the notion of mediation. The extended definition of mediation has more relevance to the reading-into-writing construct addressed in this volume.

**Table 1.2 CEFR descriptors which are relevant to reading-into-writing constructs (Council of Europe 2001; author's emphases)**

CEFR descriptors	A1	A2	B1	B2	C1	C2
<b>Overall written production (2001:61)</b>				Can write clear, detailed texts on a variety of subjects related to his/her field of interest, <b>synthesising and evaluating information and arguments from a number of sources.</b>		
<b>Reports and essays (2001:62)</b>			Can <b>summarise, report and give his/her opinion about accumulated factual information on familiar routine and non-routine matters within his/her field</b> with some confidence.			
<b>Overall reading comprehension (2001:69)</b>						Can read with a large degree of independence, adapting style and speed of reading to different texts and purposes, and <b>using appropriate reference sources selectively.</b>



**Table 1.2 (continued)**

Processing text (2001:96)	Can copy out single words and short texts presented in standard printed format.	Can copy out short texts in printed or clearly handwritten format. Can pick out and reproduce key words and phrases or short sentences from a short text within the learner's limited competence and experience.	Can collate short pieces of information from several sources and summarise them for somebody else. Can paraphrase short written passages in a simple fashion, using the original text wording and ordering.	Can summarise a wide range of factual and imaginative texts, commenting on and discussing contrasting points of view and the main themes. Can summarise extracts from news items, interviews or documentaries containing opinions, argument and discussion. Can summarise the plot and sequence of events in a film or play.	Can summarise long, demanding texts.	Can summarise information from different sources, reconstructing arguments and accounts in a coherent presentation of the overall result.
------------------------------	---	---	--	--	--------------------------------------	---

## Defining Integrated Reading-into-Writing Constructs

an individual language skill, reading or writing. Only four of the 12 scales which focus on reading and writing make specific reference to integrated use of skills.

As shown in Table 1.2, what is seemingly lacking is a systematic reference of the integrated reading-into-writing skills (and arguably other types of integrated skills) in the CEFR. The scale of *processing text* has the most complete description of the aspect of integrated skills involved across the levels, whereas the other three scales have occasional mentions at either B1 or B2 levels. Compared to the scales on writing (e.g. creative writing, writing correspondence, overall written interaction) and reading (e.g. reading correspondence, reading for orientation, reading for information and argument, and reading for instructions), it therefore appears that there is room to provide a more complete set of descriptors for the integrated reading-into-writing skills in the CEFR. It is hoped that the findings reported in this volume will provide the empirical basis to describe learners' integrated reading-into-writing skills in academic contexts and to identify the task variables which need to be considered for their contribution to difficulty.

### 1.2 Aims and scope of the empirical research reported in this volume

This volume reports on a series of three validation studies whose aim was to investigate the integrated reading-into-writing construct in academic contexts in terms of its context, cognitive and criterion-related validity.

Context validity concerns the internal task features and linguistic demands of the test task, as well as the external social and cultural contexts in which the test task is used (Weir 2005a). Cognitive validity concerns the individual language user and their cognitive or mental processing of the test (Field 2013, Weir 2005a). Criterion-related validity is concerned with the extent to which test scores correlate with a suitable external criterion of performance (Weir 2005a) (more discussion of these validity components is provided throughout the volume). As this volume mainly addresses the construct of integrated reading-into-writing skills in academic contexts, the discussion is focused on the CEFR B2 and C1 levels which are most relevant to academic language use. Specifically, the research was conducted in three strands to address each of these validity components:

1. To examine the predominant contextual features of a range of real-life academic writing tasks and reading-into-writing test tasks.
2. To investigate the cognitive processes writers employed to complete these integrated tasks.
3. To explore the relationships between reading-into-writing test scores and real-life academic writing scores.